

Vermont farmers devastated by Tropical Storm Irene will receive much-needed disaster assistance through two important federal programs. The funding levels for both programs were agreed to by a House-Senate conference committee negotiating fiscal year 2012 funding levels for U.S. Department of Agriculture programs.

“Many Vermont farmers were knocked down by Tropical Storm Irene but they are characteristically fighting to get back on their feet. This funding will give them a much-needed boost,” Welch said. “We were ultimately successful in our efforts because Republicans and Democrats in the House worked together to secure disaster relief. And Senator Leahy, with the strong support of Senator Sanders, delivered once again for Vermont farmers by helping secure this final agreement.”

The agreement adds \$122.7 million to the USDA’s Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) and \$215.9 million to the USDA’s Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP). Both programs are nearly out of funds with a backlog of pending applications for assistance.

ECP provides emergency funding and technical assistance for farmers to rehabilitate farmland damaged by natural disasters. EWP helps farmers reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat and reduce damages caused by floods. The program will also help property owners stabilize stream banks and clear river debris that might pose threats to their property. **The deadline to apply for EWP funding related to Tropical Storm Irene damage is Friday, November 18th.**

A member of the House Agriculture Committee, Welch made securing these funds, along with funding for the repair of Vermont’s damaged roads and bridges, his top priorities. (To see Welch priorities memo to House leaders, [CLICK HERE](#)). Joined by Rep. Chris Gibson (R-N.Y.), Welch met with House Majority Leader Eric Cantor and others to urge the reversal of an earlier House decision to zero out these two programs.

Welch also worked closely with Reps. Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.) and Bill Owens (D-N.Y.) who, along with Welch and Gibson, are co-chairs of the bipartisan House Hurricane Irene Coalition founded by Welch.

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), the number two member of the Senate Appropriations and Agriculture Committees, ensured that both programs were funded in the Senate bill and the final conference committee agreement.

The conference agreement will be voted on by the House and Senate this week.